

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4955

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 4250

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS DEA; EN/CASEY

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: CASC/CS, PFOR, PGOV (VESCO, ROBERT)

SUBJECT: VESCO CASE

1. FORMER PRESIDENT JOSE FIGUERES TOLD ME AUGUST 30 THAT ROBERT VESCO HAD REQUESTED HIS ASSISTANCE IN ARRANGING THROUGH DEA A DEAL UNDER WHICH VESCO WOULD COOPERATE IN ENTRAPMENT OF MAJOR FIGURE OR FIGURES IN COLOMBIAN DRUG TRADE IN EXCHANGE FOR EASING OF USG PRESSURES. HE SAID VESCO WAS OUT OF CASH AND NEEDED TO HAVE SOME FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT IN ORDER TO DEVELOP ACCESS TO BLOCKED FUNDS IN OTHER COUNTRIES. (PRESUMABLY HE WOULD COOPERATE WITH DEA IN EXCHANGE FOR USG AGREEMENT NOT TO PURSUE HIS EXTRADITION IF HE WERE TO TRAVEL OUTSIDE OF COSTA RICA.) FIGUERES ALSO SAID THAT HE HAD PERSUADED VESCO THAT HIS COOPERATION WITH USG IN NARCOTICS MATTERS MIGHT IMPROVE HIS IMAGE. FIGUERES SAID THAT TO BEST OF HIS KNOWLEDGE VESCO WAS NOT NOW INVOLVED IN NARCOTICS AND HE STATED THAT HE WOULD NOT HESITATE TO EXPOSE VESCO TO USG IF HE WERE TO LEARN THAT VESCO HAD BECOME INVOLVED IN TRAFFICKING. FIGUERES EXPRESSED HIS HOPE THAT USG WOULD ACCEPT VESCO'S OFFER. IN HIS OPINION IT PROVIDED EXCELLENT CHANCE TO BREAK UP "COLOMBIAN LABORATORY."

2. FIGUERES ALSO SAID THAT HE DID NOT BELIEVE THAT VESCO PLANNED TO MOVE TO ANOTHER COUNTRY IN THE NEAR FUTURE. HE THOUGHT IT POSSIBLE THAT VESCO WAS PLANTING RUMORS TO THAT

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EFFECT IN AN EFFORT TO CONFUSE OTHERS.

3. DRAWING ON MY BRIEFING AT DEA DURING JUNE CONSULTATIONS, I TOLD DON PEPE THAT I WAS AWARE OF FIGUERES' OFFER TO DEA TO ARRANGE FOR A HIGH WASHINGTON-BASED DEA OFFICIAL TO MEET WITH VESCO AT FIGUERES' RESIDENCE IN SAN JOSE. I ALSO TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO REITERATE TO FIGUERES THAT NO MATTER WHAT MAY HAVE TRANSPIRED IN THE PAST, THE AMBASSADOR CONTROLS AND IS AWARE OF ACTIVITIES OF ALL USG AGENCIES IN COUNTRY; IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO BYPASS THE EMBASSY IN SUCH MATTERS. FIGUERES AGREED THAT THIS IS WAY THINGS SHOULD BE.

4. ON AUGUST 31 FIGUERES CALLED ME TO SAY THAT HE HAD TOLD VESCO THERE WAS UNLIKELY TO BE ANY DEAL WITH DEA WITHOUT EMBASSY OR STATE DEPARTMENT INVOLVEMENT AND THAT VESCO DID NOT POSE ANY OBJECTION. FIGUERES SAID HE WOULD BE HAPPY TO PURSUE THE MATTER AND ARRANGE FOR MEETING IF USG WISHED. I PROMISED FIGUERES I WOULD REPORT THIS MATTER AND GET BACK TO HIM SOONEST.

5. COMMENT: UNLESS DEA HAS GOOD REASON TO BELIEVE THAT A MEETING WITH VESCO COULD LEAD TO A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH THAT COULD NOT OTHERWISE BE ACHIEVED, I THINK IT WOULD BE INADVISABLE TO ACCEPT VESCO'S OFFER TO TALK. THERE IS AT LEAST AN EVEN CHANCE THAT DEA/EMBASSY MEETING WITH VESCO WOULD BECOME PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE HERE, AND THIS WOULD TEND TO STRENGTHEN WIDELY-HELD VIEW THAT USG HAS NOT REALLY BEEN SERIOUS ABOUT VESCO'S EXTRA-DITION. WERE USG TO ENTER INTO SOME KIND OF DEAL WITH VESCO ON ASSUMPTION THAT EXTRADITION NOT FEASIBLE ANYWAY, WE WOULD BE RESTORING TO VESCO AN AURA OF LEGITIMACY AND RESPECTABILITY THAT HE NOW LACKS. THIS MIGHT OFFER SOME SHORT-TERM COMFORT TO THE LOCAL HIGH-LEVEL GOVERNMENTAL AND POLITICAL FIGURES WHO HAVE BEEN TARRED BY THE VESCO BRUSH BUT IT WOULD EARN US THE RESENTMENT OF LARGE NUMBERS OF COSTA RICANS WHO THINK VESCO'S PRESENCE HERE IS A MENACE TO COSTA RICAN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT.

6. ACTION REQUESTED: REQUEST DEPARTMENT COORDINATE WITH DEA AND JUSTICE IN BALANCING OF U.S. INTERESTS AND PROVIDE GUIDANCE. ALSO WOULD APPRECIATE KNOWING WHAT CONTACT IF ANY VESCO REPRESENTATIVES MAY HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKING RECENTLY WITH CONFIDENTIAL

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DEA. TODMAN

NOTE BY OCT: NOT PASSED DEA.

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